

8/02/2006

Comments of Dr. Jody G. Bennett
At the Transit Oriented Development Citizen Panel
Fairfax County Government Center

The following includes some of the key points that were made during the 8-10 minute presentation. Presentation follows the slides as major talking points.

Slide 1: Introduction

I am Jody Bennett and I live on Hunter Mill Road, Vienna, Virginia. I have been a member of the Hunter Mill Defense League, a volunteer organization whose focus has been on land use and transportation issues in the Hunter Mill Road corridor. I recently served on the Hunter Mill Road Special Study Task Force, a task force whose members were drawn from the Hunter Mill and Dranesville Districts.

Slide 2: TOD: An Elusive Concept and is subject to different interpretations.

- **Fluid Boundaries:**

Arlington has a transit oriented development boundary of ¼ mile from the transit station. I have been told that a line has been drawn that states that high density and uses will go here and no further. There was a community based participation in defining TOD for the transit corridor.

Fairfax County has indicated a ¼ mile from the transit platform for the more intense density and use. They also use a ½ mile from the transit platform for the outer circle area that will hold density and use that taper down to the outer boundary adjacent to neighborhoods.

- **Undefined Parameters:**

TOD areas are to contain higher density and mix use. What we see happening is a lack of specificity in defining if there should be balance among residential, employment and retail uses.

Some say that TOD is just a high density real estate project....more residential development, less office and retail.

Others say that TOD projects look too much like their auto-oriented counterparts.....wide streets with a lack of useable open space.

There is concern that TOD tends to lean more towards residential densities, less for office and retail.

For example, a recent TOD development at Dunn Loring is now identified as multi-family residential with minimum retail. This is not consistent with TOD criteria which emphasize a place to live, work, and play.

- **Myth vs Reality:**

Examples of myth verses reality are shown with Slides 3, 4, and 5

There are realities with TOD design and development. For example a citizens' task force developed land units for the Proposed Reston-Herndon

Transit Stations. Density circles were shown around the Wiehle Station, Reston Parkway Station and Herndon-Monroe Station. The general location of the transit station platforms were identified with a proposed density circle of ¼ and ½ mile distance.

During the last Area Plan Review process, an applicant submitted a plan nomination for intense residential and mix use in a low density residential area.

The proposed development was outside the Wiehle Station density circle. In fact, part of the proposed development was almost two miles away from the transit station platform. The development definition went from TOD to “transit friendly.”

Well defined boundaries and parameters will establish that “projects located nearby” or “transit friendly” do not meet the criteria for TOD. In addition, projects that are removed from the outer density circle but are called TOD because of a shuttle system that moves from the project to the transit station platform should also be rejected as not meeting the criteria for TOD. I understand that Arlington has well defined boundaries for its TOD areas.

Slide 6

Live-Work-Play

TOD was a concept that originated in the early 1990s. One major purpose was to increase rider-ship of transit.

Some of the objectives included improving air quality, protecting open space, and providing housing choices.

In regards to protecting open space, the question is: If there is to be high density mix use at one TOD site, then the promised preserved open space should be identified. If not, TODs fail to meet the criteria related to preserving open space in Fairfax County.

At TOD workshops, plan and rezoning hearings, and in dialogues with developers, we hear that TOD will provide diversity of housing.

Several years ago West*Group submitted an application for higher residential density and retail use to be located in Tysons Corner. An opportunity to include diversity of housing (such as ADUs) was lost when the applicant made a one million dollar contribution to the housing fund for off-site ADUs that would not be located at a transit site. Therefore, if we want to be assured that TOD does provide for live-work-play, then diversity of housing, including ADUs, should be on site.

Slide 7

Housing Choices

One example of providing housing choices is shown in Slide 8.

(<http://www.theloftsatparkcrest.com>)

Park Crest in Tysons is being advertised as the latest addition to the list of TOD close to 2 Metro stations. Prices range from high \$400,000 for 1 Bedroom to low one million for a 2 Bedroom.

Lofts at Park Crest go for \$496,000 for a 740 sq foot to low one million for a 1600 sq foot space. Plus there are added fees ranging from \$396 to almost \$700 for monthly fees.

Will the housing cost at TOD restrict many people from taking advantage of TOD? How will the high price of housing in Tysons Corner impact achieving the diversity of housing that should be provided by TOD?

Slide 9

Reality: What do we need to do?

We must forge agreement on a functional definition of TOD.

We must be prepared to articulate quantifiable goals and measurable performance standards that drive all aspects of design and implementation of any given TOD project.

We must identify the impact of different design choice on adjacent neighborhoods and infrastructures.

We must have a clearly defined vision for TOD that includes all of Fairfax County.

(When the panelist were asked to state their vision of TOD, my response was that citizens must be given the opportunity to self select to serve on committees whose work is to identify the vision and the parameters of TOD. Unfortunately this was not the case for Reality Check or for the Tysons Corner summit that was held at George Mason University. I understand participation in these events were by invitation only.)

Slide 10

Is this TOD (Tysons Corner)

At a meeting someone stated that if the 20 plus pending applications to replan and rezone the area were approved, the anticipated new vehicle trips per day would be 500,000 after factoring in 50% transit rider-ship.

The question is how will adjacent neighborhoods be protected? It is suggested that street grids should be part of the design.

Slide 11

In closing, what do we know?

We must forge agreement on a functional definition of TOD which includes clearly stated rules of what is TOD.

We must articulate quantifiable goals and measurable performance standards that drive all aspects of design and implementation of any given TOD project

We must protect adjacent neighborhoods and roads and other support services and infrastructures.

We must have a vision for TOD that includes county-wide planning.

We must identify how each TOD site fits into the larger residential, employment, transportation, and open space networks for Fairfax County.

Recommendation: Go to the TOD website. There are many valuable resources related to TOD. <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning/tod.htm>